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no potential conflict of interest with the applicants.

(2) Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made for responsiveness to the program solicitation (e.g., relationship of proposal to research topic(s) listed in solicitation). Proposals that do not fall within the guidelines as stated in the program solicitation will be eliminated from competition and will be returned to the applicant.

(3) Proposals will be ranked based on evaluation criteria established in § 4285.70 of this subpart, and financial support levels will be recommended to the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services by the panel within the limitation of the total funding available in the fiscal year. The purpose of these evaluations is to provide information upon which the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services may make informed judgments in selecting proposals. Such recommendations are advisory only and are not binding on the awarding official of RDA or its successor agency. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, all applications should be written with the care and thoroughness accorded papers for publication.

(b) *Disposition.* (1) On the basis of the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services's evaluation of an application in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section, the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services will either:

(i) Approve support using currently available funds;

(ii) Defer support due to lack of funds or need for further evaluation; or

(iii) Disapprove support for the proposed project in whole or in part.

(2) With respect to any approved project, the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services will determine the project period during which the project may be funded.

(3) Any deferral or disapproval of an application will not preclude its reconsideration or reapplication during subsequent fiscal years. However, applicants must reapply if reconsideration is desired.

(4) The Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services will not make a cooperative agreement funding award,

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based upon an application covered by this part, unless the application has been properly reviewed in accordance with the provisions of this part and unless said reviewers have made recommendations concerning the scientific merit and relevance to the program of such application.

§ 4285.70 Evaluation criteria.

(a) In evaluating the proposal, the RDA or its successor agency staff review panel and the awarding official will take into account the degree to which the proposal demonstrates the following:

(1) Focus on a practical solution to a significant problem involving one or more of the following on a cooperative business basis: the preparation for market, processing, packaging, handling, storing, transporting, distributing, or marketing of agricultural products. (35%)

(2) Adequacy, soundness, and appropriateness of the proposed approach to solve the identified problem. (30%)

(3) Feasibility and probability of success of project solving the problem. (10%)

(4) Qualifications, experience in related work, competence, and availability of project personnel to direct and carry out the project. (25%)

(b) In addition, the cost relative to the expected research results will be considered in determining the awarding of the agreements.

§§ 4285.71–4285.80 [Reserved]

§ 4285.81 Cooperative agreement awards.

(a) *General.* Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official shall make awards for cooperative agreements to those applicants whose proposals are judged most meritorious in the announced program areas under the evaluation criteria and procedures set forth in this part. The date specified by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services as the beginning of the project period shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. All funds awarded under

this part shall be expended solely in accordance with the methods identified in approved application and budget, the regulations of this part, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's "Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations" (part 3015 of this title) and the Department's "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments" (part 3016 of this title).

(b) *Cooperative agreement award document and notice of award.* (1) Cooperative agreement award document. The award document shall include at a minimum the following:

(i) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services has competitively awarded funds under the terms of this part;

(ii) Title of project;

(iii) Name(s) and address(es) of principal investigator(s) chosen to direct and control approved activities;

(iv) Identifying cooperative agreement number assigned by RDA or its successor agency;

(v) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Agency intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;

(vi) Total amount of Agency financial assistance approved by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services during the project period;

(vii) Legal authority(ies) under which the cooperative agreement is awarded;

(viii) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the cooperative agreement award; and

(ix) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by RDA or its successor agency to carry out its agreement activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular cooperative agreement.

(2) Notice of award. The notice of award of funds for the cooperative agreement will be in the form of a letter providing pertinent instructions or information to the cooperator.

(c) *Types of cooperative agreement instruments.* The types of cooperative agreements shall be as follows:

(1) New agreement. This is an agreement instrument by which RDA or its successor agency agrees to support a specified level of effort for a project not supported previously under this program. This type of agreement is approved on the basis of an RDA or its successor agency Staff evaluation review and recommendation.

(2) Renewal agreement. This is an agreement instrument by which RDA or its successor agency agrees to provide additional funding for a project beyond the period approved in an original or amended agreement, provided that the cumulative period does not exceed the statutory limitation. When a renewal application is submitted, it must include a summary of progress to date from the previous agreement period. A renewal agreement shall be based upon new application, de novo review and staff evaluation, new recommendation and approval, and a new award instrument.

(3) Supplemental agreement. This is an instrument by which RDA or its successor agency agrees to provide small amounts of additional funding under a new or renewal cooperative agreement as specified in paragraphs (c)(1) and (c)(2) of this section and may involve a short-term (usually one year or less) extension of the project period beyond that approved in an original or amended award, but in no case may the cumulative period for the project exceed the statutory limitation. A supplement is awarded only if required to assure adequate completion of the original scope of work and if there is sufficient justification to warrant such action. A request of this nature will not require additional review.

(d) *Obligation of the Federal Government.* The approval of any application or the award of any funds for a cooperative agreement shall not commit nor obligate the United States in any way to make any renewal, supplemental, continuation, or other award with respect to any approved application or portion of an approved application.

(e) *Obligation of the cooperator.* The cooperator shall be responsible for:

(1) Making a brief quarterly progress reports at the end of each December, March, June and September to the

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FSROC program staff for the duration of the research project;

(2) Presenting a final administrative report on the project at the end of the research project; and

(3) Preparing and publishing a report(s) of research findings for dissemination to interested producers, cooperatives, and agencies. Include recognition to financial and other assistance received from the FSROC program.

§ 4285.82 Use of funds; changes.

(a) *Delegation of fiscal responsibility.* The cooperator may not, in whole or in part, delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of cooperative agreement funds.

(b) *Change in project plans.* (1) The permissible changes by the cooperator, principal investigator(s), or other key project personnel in the approved cooperative agreement shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the cooperator and/or the principal investigator(s) is uncertain whether a particular change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services for a final determination.

(2) Changes in approved goals, or objectives, shall be requested by cooperator and approved in writing by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services, or authorized delegate, prior to effecting such changes. Normally, no requests for such changes outside the scope of the original approved project will be approved.

(3) Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or realignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the cooperator and approved in writing by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services, or authorized delegate, prior to effecting such changes.

(4) Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the cooperator and approved in writing by the Assistant Administrator

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for Cooperative Services, or authorized delegate, prior to effecting such changes, except as may be allowed in the terms and conditions of a cooperative agreement award.

(c) *Changes in project period.* The project period determined pursuant to § 4285.81(b) of this subpart may be extended by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services determines may be necessary to complete, or fulfill the purposes of, an approved project. Any extension, when combined with the originally approved or amended project period, shall not exceed four (4) years and shall be further conditioned upon prior request by the cooperator and approval in writing by the Assistant Administrator for Cooperative Services, or authorized delegate, except as may be allowed in the terms and conditions of a cooperative agreement award.

(d) *Changes in approved budget.* The terms and conditions of a cooperative agreement will prescribe circumstances under which written Agency approval must be requested and obtained prior to instituting changes in an approved budget.

§§ 4285.83–4285.92 [Reserved]

§ 4285.93 Other Federal statutes and regulations that apply.

Several other Federal statutes and regulations apply to cooperative agreement proposals considered for review or to agreements awarded under this part. These include but are not limited to:

(a) 7 CFR Part 1, Subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act;

(b) 7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-129 regarding debt collection;

(c) 7 CFR Part 15, Subpart A—USDA implementation of title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in order to assure nondiscrimination;

(d) 7 CFR Part 1473—National Agricultural, Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act Amendments of 1981 if the project involves a college or university;